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INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//JF/UNMA//
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3702
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3499
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 6685
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 2028

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000680

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CR, SCA/PAB, S/CT
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR HARRIMAN
OSD FOR KIMMITT
CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76, AND POLAD
RELEASABLE TO NATO/AUST/NZ/ISAF

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRT/GARDEZ: GOVERNOR'S PLAN TO DEAL WITH TALIBAN
STRONGHOLD

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Paktia governor Rahmatullah Rahmat announced on Jan. 30 that he intends to move energetically and methodically to bring Zormat District, currently plagued by insurgency, under government control. He outlined a plan, developed with UNAMA, to reform the district administrative and security apparatus and implement high-profile, consensus-building development schemes. The plan calls for the replacement of Taliban-influenced officials with loyal government representatives, enhancement of local ANA and ANP forces, deploying nearly one-third of Paktia's ANAP contingent there, a possible increase in coalition force presence, engagement with tribal leaders to eliminate Taliban influence in the district shura and to formalize tribal responsibility for securing the area. Zormat has been a traditional bastion of Taliban influence. Insurgents have used the district's strategic location astride key transportation routes between Pakistan and central Afghanistan as a safe haven, staging area, and conduit for attacks elsewhere. Governor Rahmat's aggressive personal style and extensive knowledge of the region and local tribal structures may generate some success in subduing Zormat, creating a significant blow to the Taliban's anticipated spring offensive in Central and Eastern Afghanistan. END SUMMARY.

Zormat a Taliban Hub

12. (SBU) Paktia Governor Rahmat briefed a meeting of the PDC on Jan. 30 regarding plans to deal with Paktia's chief security objective: gaining effective control of Southeastern Zormat District. Rahmat stated that Paktia's overall security situation was not as bad as many parts of the country, but that Zormat was heavily influenced by Taliban insurgents. Taliban have exploited the weak tribal structure in Zormat to gain essential control over the tribal and district shuras and to intimidate government officials. The Taliban use the area for safe haven and transit to coordinate attacks on neighboring provinces and Kabul. As a result, the provincial government cannot administer the area effectively nor can development projects be implemented freely and without insurgent harassment.

Government to Assert Control

13. (SBU) Rahmat outlined a plan to stabilize Zormat and establish a viable government presence in the district, which now lies beyond the pale of his administration's control. He said that he intends to develop a strong, pro-government tribal shura in Zormat that would be responsible for self-policing the area. The governor explained that he would replace current Shura members who were either actual Taliban or under Taliban influence and then sign a self-policing agreement with the Shura. He would model the

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agreement on one he had signed recently with the tribal Shura for Northeastern Pathan District, which borders Pakistan. Under the terms of this agreement, continued government development assistance is contingent on Shura compliance in deterring insurgent activities in the district. Rahmat asserted that locals caught supporting or participating in Taliban activities would have their houses destroyed and be fined 200,000 Afghanis (About USD 4000). The governor also said that he planned to augment the ANA and ANP presence in Zormat in order to provide sufficient security for government administrators and international aid representatives to operate with impunity.

Detailed Plan

14. (SBU) Governor Rahmat's brief was based on a detailed "Zormat Stabilization Initiative" that he developed with UNAMA in concert with the PRT and local coalition forces. The three-phased plan focuses on administrative reform, enhanced security, tribal engagement, and high impact reconstruction/economic development programs. During the initial phase, the governor would remove the current disloyal or inactive officials with trustworthy appointees; notably the District Commissioner, the local prosecutor, and the heads of the civil and Ulema courts and create a supportive religious council. The provincial government also intends to ensure that local ANA, ANP, and NDS contingents stationed in Zormat are at least 80 percent of intended strengths. This move would result in an added 40 ANP troopers being stationed in Zormat, for example. In addition, almost one-third (80 out of 300 total) of the ANAP allotted to Paktia would be assigned to Zormat after the ANAP training is completed within the next three months. Paktia officials also will explore possibilities for an increased ISAF presence in the district, including the establishment of a FOB in Zormat.

15. (SBU) In order to address needed administrative reform, the governor would create an advisory council of tribal elders to work with him in creating a representative and responsive district tribal shura. Provincial officials would similarly consult with local religious leaders to create a fully functional religious council, which would help to legitimize government programs and counter the Taliban's religious appeal. Development programs would be designed to provide immediate and concrete benefit to Zormat residents and, thereby, a practical reason for backing the government. The PRT, UNAMA, AID and the GOA would concentrate on low-cost, high impact development, such as mosque and road refurbishment and irrigation projects. (Note: Per guidelines, AID funds would not be used for the mosque refurbishment. End note.) Activities planned for the following two phases would seek to strengthen and institutionalize security, administrative, and developmental initiatives slated for the initial phase.

Background

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16. (SBU) Zormat is Paktia's largest and most populous district and is a transportation hub with major routes from neighboring Paktika, Ghazni and Logar provinces passing through its borders. The Taliban, and previously anti-Russian Mujahidin, frequent a couple of these routes, especially one starting in Pakistan and passing through Paktika to Southern Ghazni. Another connects the district with Taliban bases in Pakistan through the Zadran District in the Khost-Paktia pass region. Insurgents also remain in Zormat and use the district as a staging area. Zormat was a Taliban stronghold during the Taliban regime and many Zormatis maintain links with Taliban insurgents. Taliban influence within the district government and an ineffective, corrupt ANP presence have made the area extremely dangerous for development activities and a viable provincial government presence untenable. There have been numerous attacks and kidnappings against government officials and development implementers. The unimpeded Taliban influence in Zormat is a de-stabilizing influence for the entire region; promoting and enhancing insurgent activities in adjacent provinces. Officials and coalition representatives fully expect Zormat to be a focus of insurgent activity during the Taliban's anticipated spring offensive.

Comment

17. (SBU) Controlling Zormat is the key to government counter-insurgency efforts in Paktia. While the Wazi Zadran and Swak Districts of the Khost-Gardez Pass region are also insurgent hotbeds, Zormat would appear to be the more strategic area for thwarting Taliban activities. The District's size, transportation routes, and borders with insurgent areas of other provinces make Zormat a more easily accessed and infiltrated zone. Governor Rahmat's emphasis on tribal engagement and self-policing to deter insurgent activities is one of his fundamental approaches to building government control throughout the province. The governor's aggressive personal style and feel for the local tribal system (he worked for UNAMA in Paktia for five years) provide hope that he will be able to negotiate effectively with tribal leaders and not back

down when confronting the insurgent threat.

NEUMANN